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# ANTIDOTE

TO

## “West-Indian Sketches,”

DRAWN

FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES.

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No. VI.

### OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

*AMELIORATED CONDITION OF THE NEGROES*

IN THE

BRITISH WEST INDIA COLONIES, &c.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR WHITMORE AND FENN,  
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1817.

**ERRATA IN No. V.**

Page 6, line 34, *dele* "Edwards."  
— 9, — 32, *for* "as," *read* "so."

## ANTIDOTE

TO

### *“West Indian Sketches, &c.”*

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THE Editor of the West Indian Sketches is exceedingly indignant that we should “think proper to raise our harsh and feeble note” (as he terms it) in the exposure of the misrepresentations, which are so unremittingly circulated against the West Indian Communities. He says we are “perfectly welcome to continue our polemical howls,” and very elegantly observes, that “every animal has its cry.” He wishes us to “make an oath, or a solemn declaration in writing, signed in our name, that we do really, and *bonâ fide* believe our own assertions—he will then,” he says, “give up the point;” and, “though he cannot promise to believe us, or that any one else will,” he very obligingly “promises never to accuse us again.”—It would ill become us to make any reply to these, and other equally undignified tirades:—we know too well what is due to ourselves, and to the deep importance of the subject before us, to be led into any such intemperate expressions. It was natural, perhaps, that one, who was sensible of having compromised his character for impartiality and candor, should attempt by violence to bear down all, who would represent the facts in their true light. It was natural that the editor should be chagrined and disappointed at our having exposed his disingenuous attempt to mislead the public, on the subject of our West India colonies: but we can assure him that we are as much above the possibility of being diverted from the cause, in which we are engaged, as our character is beyond the reach of his invective.

We have not taken up the subject without due consideration—nor shall we hastily relinquish it, although we may have to sustain all the violence and intemperate abuse of the Editor of the Sketches, and other writers who hold the same doctrines.

He affects to believe “that it is scarcely possible for us to have read the Sketches with any care.”—Whether we have done so, or not, will best appear by the exposure we have made of the calumnies they contain. The preceding numbers of the Antidote stand on record, and will answer for themselves: we are quite content to leave it to the decision of the public, whether they do not prove the disingenuous means, by which he has endeavoured to calumniate the West India body.

He says, our “accusations against him may be reduced principally to three: that he is perpetually charging on all the colonists, to the unjust and indiscriminate defamation of their characters, all the atrocious crimes which have at any time been committed by the most inhuman individuals, whom we detest equally with himself; and among the rest, all the tyranny and oppression, committed by the Dutch in Guiana, although the harshness of their treatment, and the comparative humanity of the English, are matters of perfect notoriety;—that he has imputed to the present generation the misdeeds of their predecessors twenty or thirty years ago, passing over the intermediate amelioration, which has taken place,—and that, still with the same unfairness of intention, he has, by

suppressing all the favorable circumstances in Dr. Pinckard's narration, completely reversed the impression of the state of British colonial slavery, which his history is calculated, (whether intended or not) to convey."

The Editor is not quite correct in stating that the charges against him may be *reduced principally to these three*, which appear to refer only to Dr. Pinckard's work. He should have mentioned the proofs we adduced of his having suppressed very important passages, both in the House of Commons' papers, and in the printed trial of Arthur Hodge, from which he made such partial extracts,—nay “*of his having suppressed those very passages, which directly and unequivocally substantiated the reverse of his propositions.*” He now keeps these facts out of view—he endeavours to explain away his former broad assertions, that “the whole community, and all the magistrates of Tortola, connived at Hodge's crimes;—that the laws were violated, to screen him from punishment;—that his atrocities were publicly known, and still no one shunned his company, or disapproved of his conduct; that it would have been perfectly romantic and highly ridiculous for any one to have taken steps against him,” &c. Now, when he finds how complete his refutation has been, he would persuade us that he did not mean that even “*a doubt of the temper of the whites should be proposed without discrimination,*” although, in a subsequent passage, he declares that the “moral perceptions and feelings, which prevail in the West Indies, are different from those on this side of the Atlantic,” forgetting, also, his former declaration, that he charges the resident West Indians generally “with favoring such criminals, merely because they are whites, and of the cast of masters, and with tolerating their crimes, because committed on those, who are black, or of the cast of slaves.”

We have not forgotten all this—we have not forgotten that, in speaking of Mr. Higgins's cruelty to his slaves in Nevis,—he declares that “*his conduct seems only to have raised him to a higher elevation in the regards of the resident planters of Nevis; while those, who endeavoured to bring him to punishment, became the objects of general distrust and obloquy.*”—Now with regard to this assertion of his—it may be well to enquire *who it was* that “endeavoured to bring him to punishment, and thus became the objects of such general distrust and obloquy?”—Perhaps the reader will expect to hear that it was one or two individuals, standing up in the cause of humanity, against the whole community of planters, with whom, the Editor says, “*it is an established principle to unite as one man against the negroes:*”—Or perhaps he will imagine that it was one of the “numerous correspondents in the West Indies, from whom the Directors of the African Institution have derived much important information.” What then will be his surprise at reading in the Parliamentary papers, laid before the House of Commons in 1812,—that not only both Houses of the Legislature, but the Island in general were animated with one common feeling of indignation and abhorrence at Mr. Higgins' conduct:—that, a few days after the cruel punishment, which he inflicted upon his slaves, a gentleman of the highest respectability mentioned the circumstance in his place, in the house of assembly, praying the house to proceed to an investigation of it, which they immediately did; and came to the following resolutions:—

Resolved—That it is the opinion of this house, that the conduct of Edward Higgins, Senr. Esq., on Tuesday, the 23rd of this month, in inflicting punishment on several of his negroes in the public market place of this town, was both cruel and

illegal; and that particularly in two cases, where 242, and 291 lashes were given, he was guilty of an act of barbarity, altogether unprecedented in this island.

*That this house do hold such conduct in the utmost abhorrence and detestation, which sentiments perfectly accord with the feelings of the community in general.*

*That this house do pledge themselves to promote the strictest investigation into this cruel proceeding, so disgraceful to humanity, so injurious to the fair character of the inhabitants, and so destructive to the best interests of the West India Colonies.*

*That the above resolutions, with the evidence taken in support thereof be printed: that copies be transmitted to England, and circulated through all the islands.*

*That a copy of the foregoing resolutions, with the evidence taken in support thereof, be sent to the Council for their consideration.*

The subject, then, was referred to the President of the island and the Council!—Surely these must have raised their voices in defence of the oppressor—in defence of a white—of one who was of the cast of masters!—surely the “West Indian Aristocracy”—all of them planters too—could not well, on this occasion, omit “an exemplification of their feelings towards the negro race,” who, we are told, suffer under an open and undisguised oppression. *But strange to say, the President and the Council joined the House of Assembly, in their “endeavours to bring Mr. Huggins to punishment,” and sent a message to them, adopting their sentiments, and recommending that every legal measure should be taken to bring the party to trial!*

*His Honor the President, and Council to the Gentlemen of the Assembly.*

**GENTLEMEN,**

This board has considered the resolutions of your house, and the evidence taken, respecting the conduct of Mr. Edward Huggins, Senr. and adopt the sentiments of your house, in respect to the acts of cruelty, stated by such evidence to have been committed: and this board is of opinion, that every legal measure should be taken to bring the party to trial. But this board is also of opinion, that, as the party charged must be tried by another tribunal, the publication of any evidence, previous to such trial, should be avoided.

By command,

**JOHN BURKE, Junr.**

*Council Chamber, Clerk of Council.  
Jan. 31, 1810.*

Here then is the whole legislature of the island, the President, the Council, and the Assembly, uniting as one man—not against the negroes—but for their protection—not in support of the oppressor, but in vindicating the rights of the oppressed.—This, however, is not all that appears on the parliamentary papers.—The Assembly of the island, not content with expressing their abhorrence at what had taken place, *resolved to prosecute Mr. Huggins, at the public expense, declaring it to be “the opinion of their house, that one or more of the crown lawyers should be retained to conduct the prosecution against Mr. Huggins the elder, agreeable to the resolutions, entered into on the 31st of January last; and this house will make provision for the payment thereof.”* In the propriety of which, the President and Council concurred. So that, not only is it untrue that “those, who endeavoured to bring Mr. Huggins to punishment, became the objects of general distrust and obloquy”—not only is it untrue that “the indigna-

tion existed in this country, and the marked reprobation of the Prince Regent, appear to have clothed him with a kind of sanctity, as a martyr in the colonial cause!"—but within a few days after the act which he committed—the legislature, according with the feelings of the community in general, holding such conduct in the utmost abhorrence and detestation—determined to take every possible legal measure against him—and that the expense should be paid out of the public purse!—These measures, which to every impartial observer, must be gratifying and satisfactory, met also the decided approbation of His Majesty; and Lord Liverpool directed the governor of the Leeward Islands, to "signify to the Council and Assembly, His Majesty's full approbation of the sentiments expressed, and the conduct pursued by them." This letter the West Indian Sketches keep out of view—they extract particular passages from Lord Liverpool's correspondence, and entirely suppress others, which are materially important to a fair and candid statement of facts. Why should not the Editor ingenuously give us Lord Liverpool's letter of the 20th of September, 1810, which is in the very page preceding his other extracts?—Need we ask?—if the motive is not sufficiently obvious—the letter itself will explain that it was suppressed, because it directly refutes so many of the Editor's assertions.—It is addressed to Governor Elliot, and is as follows:—

Downing Street, Sep. 20, 1810.  
SIR,

It has been represented to me, that a case has recently occurred within your government, in open defiance of the law, of such extreme oppression and cruelty, exercised by an opulent planter in the island of Nevis, named Huggins, towards a number of his slaves, as to have called for investigation by

*the Council and Assembly of the Island, which, after a formal enquiry of the case, instituted proceedings against the offender, and publicly reprobated his conduct with the strongest expressions of indignation and abhorrence.*

I have, in consequence, received His Majesty's commands to desire that you will lose no time in calling upon the proper officers for authentic copies of the minutes of the Council and Assembly of Nevis, upon the above case, as also for an authentic report of any judicial proceedings, which may have ensued, or of any records or documents, which tend to throw light upon this transaction, or to bring to justice and to punishment any of the parties who were implicated therein; or to afford proof against any magistrates or other officers, who may have been so criminally negligent of their public duties, as to have witnessed or forbore to interfere, as has been asserted, in order to prevent so disgraceful a scene.

*In any communication you may make to the Council and Assembly of Nevis, upon this subject, I am commanded to desire that you will signify His Majesty's full approbation of the sentiments expressed, and the conduct pursued by them, on the above mentioned occasion, and his firm conviction that they will give every aid and support to the measures, which His Majesty may judge proper further to order, when the information hereby called for, shall be brought under consideration.*

I am, &c.

LIVERPOOL.

F. Governor Elliot, &c. &c.

Let the reader consider all these circumstances, and then say whether the West Indian Sketches have told the TRUTH in declaring that "Mr. Huggins rises in fresh dignity, after his disgraceful acquittal, as one who had suffered persecution in the sacred cause of white supremacy. " Let him refer to the parliamentary papers and other docu-

ments, which we adduced in our fourth number, proving that, in the case of Arthur Hodge, the magistrates of Tortola were indefatigable in bringing the prisoner to trial,—that the two Houses of Legislature, the President, the Council, and the Assembly, made unexampled exertions to secure his punishment—that when he was condemned to death, the inhabitants took active measures, in concert with the governor of the Leeward Islands, to see that the execution of the law was duly enforced:—let the reader refer to these documents, and then say whether the Editor's assertion that “the WHITE MOB is uniformly on the side of the oppressor” is not a calumny on the West India body. Let him refer to all or any of our preceding numbers,—compare them with the West Indian Sketches, and then say whether the Editor has not unfairly perverted the whole tenor of the facts, to which he refers.

We have every reason to believe that these Sketches are published under the sanction of the African Institution; they are only a part of that dangerous system, which begins at length to meet with the deserved reprobation of all good men:—which, being founded in prejudice, and a mistaken hope of popularity, is supported by very unworthy and disingenuous means. These Sketches are not the only medium, through which the Directors of the African Institution venture to calumniate the West India Colonies:—we are sorry to say they pursue this course in a variety of other publications, at a great expense to the funds of the society, which were raised amongst the subscribers for very different objects. In a tone of dictatorial authority, and with an air of assumed consequence, which very ill become them,—and which, we think, will now, (after what has come to light respecting their own mismanagement in Africa and Berbice) sit less well upon them than ever;—

they endeavour to excite the British Parliament to interpose in the internal legislation of the colonies,—as a stepping stone to the great object of all their hopes,—THE EMANCIPATION OF THE SLAVES. The Editor of the West Indian Sketches declares, that “the Parliament and people of England are bound to take measures for raising our fellow subjects of the West Indies from their present state of degradation and suffering.”—Again he asks “and is it to the uncontroled power of persons, capable of such atrocities,\* that the British Parliament and nation will be content to leave the destinies of so many of their fellow subjects?” These sentiments fully accord with the public reports of the African Institution, in which the Directors do not hesitate to declare that they wish to establish an interference, on the part of the British Parliament, in the internal affairs of the colonies:—an interference, which has been virtually guarded against by repeated Charters and Acts of Parliament; which has been deprecated by the greatest statesmen, who have ever shone in this country, and the danger of which has been proved by the Insurrection in St. Domingo, and the total loss to France of that valuable colony.

The Directors would, indeed, persuade us that Charters and Acts of Parliament are vain and nugatory: they would have us regard the opinion of eminent men as light in the balance, when placed against their own:—and as to the experience of times past—it is to them as a tale that is told, which, in this day of religious zeal, is irrelevant and forgotten. Fortunately, however, all these authorities are on record;—and here the colonies might rest the whole question:—here they might

\* These “atrocities” of which he speaks, were perpetrated twenty years ago in a foreign colony;—but, with his usual candor, he applies them to the English planters of the present day,—as we have shewn in our first, third, and fifth numbers.

make their first and only stand,—entrenched within the bulwark of their rights and privileges.—But we will descend from this our vantage ground, and walk down to meet the arguments of our opponents in the open plain, contenting ourselves, for the present, with proving—first, that no necessity exists for the interference of the mother country; and—second, that it would not be justified by prudence or policy.

We believe it is generally admitted, that the representations, which were made, during the abolition controversy, of the condition of the slaves in the West Indies, were very unjustly exaggerated.—It is true that, prior to the year 1784, the laws, which prevailed in the colonies, were very imperfect: and the negroes certainly were not so well protected from oppression as they now are. Several instances of individual cruelty, in particular islands, might have been, and were brought forward—It would be unreasonable, and argue a very imperfect knowledge of mankind, to suppose that, amidst the extensive population of our West Indian settlements, persons might not be found, as in all other societies, whose bad passions had led them to acts of violence and oppression. Such persons, however, were held in dishonor by the great body of resident planters, and although the legislative enactments were too often inadequate to the due punishment of offenders—yet the laws of morality and benevolence generally secured to the slaves, a gentle and indulgent treatment.

It was impossible that the many distinguished individuals, who took an active part in the abolition of the slave trade, could have any acquaintance with the society, that existed in the West Indies; they trusted, therefore, to the representations, which were made to them, by a few individuals, whose zeal carried them even beyond the bounds of probability,—as was proved by the evi-

dence of some of the most eminent characters in the country who declared that the planters in general were humane and merciful.

We know—indeed the Editor of the West Indian Sketches tells us, that “the testimony of officers of high rank, admirals and generals, who have served in the West Indies, in favor of the mildness and humanity of the planters,” makes no impression on the judgement of those, who declare their hostility to the colonies. We confess, however, that we should be at a loss to find any testimony more honorable—more satisfactory, or more likely to be unbiassed and free from prejudice, than of such men as Lord Rodney, Sir Peter Parker, Admiral Barrington, Sir Joshua Rowley, and Sir William Hotham.—We subjoin part of their evidence before the privy council in 1789, and leave it to others to decide whether such names are entitled to credit or not.

QUESTION put by the lords of the Privy council.

“What have you observed of the behaviour of masters towards their negro slaves, in those islands, where you have commanded?”

ANSWERS.

*Lord Rodney*—“I speak to all the West India Islands, but particularly to the island of Jamaica; and I am able to speak from experience, ever since the year 1761. I never saw any other than humane and proper behaviour to them. There is not any plantation without the attendance of a surgeon, most of whom come from England. I never saw any instance of cruelty, but, on the contrary, great forbearance. The punishments inflicted are not too severe; and it is to be observed that by whipping a negro, his value is diminished, for if he bears the mark of having been flogged, the price of him is sunk one half.”

*Sir Peter Parker*—“I commanded

on the Jamaica station, between four and five years during the last war, and I not only never saw, but never heard of any instance of cruelty exercised towards them. At the houses where I visited, I observed that the negroes were treated with the greatest humanity and attention, and particularly when they was sick."

*Admiral Barrington*—“ I cannot speak with much relation to the Island of Jamaica, thirty-five years having elapsed since I was stationed there: during my service in the last war, I was chiefly at sea; but I was stationed at Barbadoes about three months, where I went on shore every morning, and most frequently visited the plantations that lay near the shore, and I never saw any act of cruelty exercised upon the negroes.”

*Sir Joshua Rowley*—“ I was stationed at Jamaica between three and four years during the last war, and never saw any cruelty used towards the negroes during the whole of that time, but the negroes treated with the greatest attention.”

*Admiral Hotham*—“ I have been three times in the West Indies, twice at the Windward Islands (residing there about five years in the whole,) and once in Jamaica, where I remained about twelve months, and was frequently on shore at Jamaica. I never saw a single punishment inflicted. In the windward Islands, I saw three instances of negroes punished by whipping, but not severely. I have seen punishments more severe inflicted on the soldiers and sailors.”

**QUESTION.**

“ Did it appear to you, that more labor was required of the negroes than they could properly bear ?”

**ANSWERS.**

*Lord Rodney*—“ They never ap-

peared to me upon any plantation to be over-worked; they do considerably less work than the laboring men in England. They work only with the hoe, and never make use of any heavy implement. They begin work just before sun rise, breakfast about eight, when I am told they are allowed one hour. At dinner they have generally two hours allowed them, from twelve o'clock till two; from thence they work till sun-set, which is about six in the afternoon.”

*Sir Peter Parker and Sir Joshua Rowley*—“ We entirely agree with the above account given by Lord Rodney.”

*Admiral Barrington*—“ The negroes are not over-worked in any respect. Compare their work with that of a sailor, belonging to a merchant ship in loading and unloading, and the latter will be found to do as much work in a day, as the former in a week.”

*Admiral Hotham*—“ I never observed that the negroes were over-worked in any respect.”

**QUESTION.**

“ Do the negroes appear to be in a desponding state, or are they in general satisfied with their condition ?”

**ANSWERS.**

*Lord Rodney*—“ So far from being in a desponding state, that I have often wished the poor in this country were in so happy a condition. The negroes have all the appearance of happiness and vivacity, and they generally dance in the evenings, after their work is ended.”

*Sir Peter Parker*—“ They appeared to me to be very happy and well satisfied with their situation. They not only dance and sing in the evenings after their work is ended, but you may here them singing in the fields while at work. They enjoy themselves a great deal

more than the white people in the West Indies."

*Admiral Barrington*—“ They have appeared to me to be so happy at times when I have been very miserable myself, that I have very often wished myself in their situation.”

*Sir Joshua Rowley*—“ They seem to me to be much happier than the poor people in this country.”

*Admiral Hotham*—“ I have always observed the negroes to be very cheerful, good humoured, and happy, especially when I have conversed with them.”

The remainder of their evidence is of a similar nature, and we venture to think it will, at least, be considered equally deserving of credit with that of Mr. Ramsay or Captain Smith, Mr. Nicholls, or Mr. Baggs, whose statements were of a very opposite nature? But let us admit, for a moment, that the assertions of these gentlemen are to be credited,—that Lord Rodney and other officers of high rank, knew nothing of the matter,—that they really did not see what they thought they saw:—let us admit Mr. Ramsay's *very temperate and credible* statement, that “ in his time almost the only instruments used in managing the slaves were the whip, bean stick, dungeon, and chains; that the master was actuated in his conduct towards them by a constant suspicious jealousy, that was to be satisfied by no exertion—that was to be softened by no attachment: that the master conscious of making his slave a mere instrument of profit, concluded that his slave must view him as his enemy and oppressor; and therefore treated him as his enemy, and oppressed him in revenge—that the negro was not treated as an object of sympathy or deserving of regard. That every possible exertion was forced out of him,—that no exertion was rewarded—that he was worked, managed, and whipped as a brute—that he was

suspected and hated as a rival, and treated as an enemy—in short, that he was a sponge, which was to be squeezed before he could be made to render his contents”—let us, for the sake of argument, admit that, between thirty and forty years since, these things were so—they would only further prove,—what is ascertained by all, who have made the colonial system an object of their impartial study,—*that in all the islands the most important and satisfactory improvements have taken place in the condition of the slaves.* This gratifying amelioration is not denied even by the Directors of the African Institution;—although they would attribute it to other than the real motives, they admit the fact, which is quite sufficient for our argument. Indeed our readers must remember that, throughout the whole of the discussions on the abolition of the slave trade,—one of the strongest inducements held out to parliament to consent to that great and good measure was, *that it would tend gradually to ameliorate the condition of the negroes, by effecting such changes in the system of management, as the interest of the planters, independent of their humanity, would naturally suggest.* It was urged that the prohibition of a further supply would render those, already in the West Indies, more valuable to their masters: that it would become the direct and immediate interest of the planter to attend to their comfort and happiness, by increasing their quantity of food, by diminishing their hours of labor, and by every regulation, which might have the effect of increasing their numbers. Not to multiply authorities upon this subject, we shall content ourselves with one or two extracts from Mr. Brougham's “ Colonial Enquiry,” published in 1803, and from Mr. Wilberforce's address to his constituents in 1807, as they forcibly illustrate the opinion they entertained of the natural and necessary consequence of the abolition of

the slave trade. Mr. Brougham says, "the abolition of the slave trade must, as we have already seen, greatly ameliorate the structure of society in the West India colonies. Every man may now be left to pursue his own interest, in his own way. Few will continue so insane as to maltreat and work out their stock, when they can no longer fill up the blanks, occasioned by their cruelty, or their inhuman and short sighted policy. A great increase of wealth, and a rapid augmentation of the negro population will be the consequence of this milder system; for every proprietor of slaves will attend to the breeding, as the only method, by which his stock can be recruited, or his cultivation extended."

Mr. Wilberforce expresses himself as follows:—"But all further importations being at length stopped, the slave market now no longer holding forth any resource, the necessity for keeping up the stock would at once become palatable and urgent. All ideas of supply from without being utterly cut off, it would immediately become the grand, constant, and incessant concern of every prudent man, both proprietor, and manager, to attend in the first instance to the preservation and increase of his negroes, &c." "The operative principle, thus supplied, would exactly answer the desired purpose. It would adapt itself to every variety of situation and circumstances; it would penetrate into the interior of every plantation! it would insure a due quantity of food, it would provide against too rigorous an exaction of labor, and enforce the adoption of those reforms, which should be found requisite for increasing the population. Many of the improvements, which must at once be introduced, are perfectly manifest; but ingenuity once set at work in this direction, a thousand discoveries will be made, a thousand reforms adopted, and a manager's credit and character now depending on the

increase of the negroes, not, as hitherto, on that of the immediate and clear returns from the estate, the former would henceforth become the great object of his study in the closet, and of his conduct in life and action." Yes, the ameliorating laws, which have been passed in all the islands since the year 1784, the abolition of the slave trade, and above all, that progress in civilization, which warms into life the gentler virtues of humanity and benevolence, have shed their benign influence on the colonial system, and introduced new regulations in favor of the negroes, which would before have been thought incompatible with their situation.

We shall not enter into a detail of the improvements that have been made. We must refer our readers to the late Report of the committee of the House of Assembly in Jamaica, as it affords so convincing a proof that the planters are actively employed in extending the laws for the better protection of their slaves.

We have no doubt the other islands will follow the bright example of Jamaica. We feel confident they will gladly adopt any laws, consistent with their own safety, which may secure to the negroes every possible degree of comfort and protection. We do not hesitate to say, that much yet remains to be done in many of the colonies—and we know that the local legislatures, and the proprietors resident in this country, have no wish nearer their hearts than to effect every amelioration, of which the condition of the negroes is susceptible.

But they will not permit a few individuals, arrogating to themselves exclusive humanity, and taking every occasion to injure their character by the most vehement and coarse abuse, to dictate to them the line of policy which they are to adopt.—They will not be forced into any measures, which they consider to be dangerous and destructive to their fortunes, because the Directors of the

African Society wish to establish their system of African freedom in the colonies. The West India body, indeed, are told "that they quite mistake their own case, and that others know much better than they do what is good for them." One thing they certainly know—they know the rights and justice of their case, and their importance in the State, to whose prosperity and wealth they so largely contribute; and they are not much disposed to resign their judgement to the abstract opinions of a small party, who (even if they had any practical acquaintance with the subject)—proclaim, on all occasions, their hostility to the colonies, and could not, therefore, be considered as impartial judges.

We cannot forget the words of Mr. Burke in one of his speeches on conciliation with the American Colonies. "I do not," says he, "know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people. I cannot insult and ridicule the feelings of millions of my fellow creatures. I am not ripe to pass sentence on the gravest public bodies, entrusted with magistracies of great authority and dignity, and charged with the safety of their fellow citizens upon the very same title that I am. I really think that for wise men, this is not judicious; for sober men, not decent; for minds tinctured with humanity, not mild and merciful."

The Directors of the African Institution would do well to temper their vehemence by some such feelings as these, before they venture to indulge in their abuse of the colonial legislatures. But it were vain to expect from them the candor and liberality of sentiment, which actuated that great statesman. They have embarked in a scheme, which to all enlightened politicians must at once appear fallacious, and impracticable, replete with danger to the happiness of those, whom they would seem to make the objects of their solicitude, and to the best interests

of the mother country. They are sensible that they must have opposed to them the judgement of all temperate men. They endeavour, therefore, by repeated calumnies against those whom they would injure, to give a false coloring to this great and momentous question, and make their appeal to the feelings and the passions of the people of this country, rather than trust to the unbiased, deliberative wisdom of Parliament.

We have shewn,—and we hope satisfactorily shewn—that the most gratifying improvements have been effected in the system of the colonies; and that the legislatures there are not only capable, but anxiously desirous to ameliorate the condition of the slaves.

We know that any exertions they may make will not keep pace with the wishes of the African Institution:—we are aware that nothing short of emancipation, as they themselves acknowledge, will satisfy them. This, however, is of little moment; their opinions are not very likely to influence the question either one way or the other: their ardent zeal will not readily overturn the long established systems of society, or the principles of eminent statesmen and politicians, who do not usually look to an immediate perfection of any system, but are satisfied to see the progress of natural causes, as the more certain and safe means of effecting their object.

"If laws, like other human institutions, be imperfect, there exists complete power and decided inclination in the local legislatures, to watch over them, and supply the best remedies, as the exigencies, calling for them, arise. This inclination has been clearly displayed by the present generation, and their Representatives, met in General Assembly; *inasmuch as more has been done to soften the rigour, and extend the protection of the law, to diminish labor, improve the condition, and augment the comforts of the slaves, during*

*the last thirty years, than had been previously accomplished from the settlement of the colony, and consequently there never was less necessity for the interposition of Parliament, on any principle of utility or expediency."*

We shall now proceed to enquire into the *policy* of interfering with the local authorities, in the enactment of laws for the colonies. We might safely rest this question on the proofs we have adduced that no *necessity* exists for such interference; for what statesman or enlightened politician would put at risk the immense interests connected with this subject, unless the necessity of a change were clearly made out?—The science of legislation is not a branch of *experimental* philosophy, and less than ever so, when the experiment is to be made on the life and property of the subject; when a large portion of the community is to be disfranchised of those rights and privileges, which they have enjoyed from time immemorial.

But, independent of these considerations, there are others, which render it highly impolitic,—nay, impossible for the British Parliament to enter into this new field of legislation.—Even if it had time and opportunity to undertake the discussion of all the minute regulations of the colonies, *upon what principles* would it begin to new model a system, which, in its first and leading feature—namely, that of security from internal revolution,—is of the most delicate nature, and the details of which require an intimate knowledge of a thousand local circumstances, that cannot come under its cognizance!—If upon abstract theory, and the hope of speculative meliorations, it would not have occasion, to trouble itself long with the care of legislation:—the whole fabric would at once give way, and we should then, when it was too late, lament the folly and ignorance of the experiment. But if the colonies are to be governed, with reference

to the local circumstances which daily arise, and according to the changes, which take place there, as in every society, and require immediate attention;—then it would be the height of folly to attempt to legislate for countries on the other side of the Atlantic.

This objection (as Burke expresses it) "is not merely moral—but deep laid in the natural constitution of things. Three thousand miles of ocean lie between you and them. No contrivance can prevent the effect of this distance in weakening government. Seas roll and months pass between the order and the execution; and the want of a single explanation of a single point is enough to defeat a whole system. You have, indeed, winged ministers of vengeance, who carry your bolts in their pounces to the remotest verge of the Sea. But there a power steps in, that limits the arrogance of raging passions and furious elements, and says so far shalt thou go and no farther." Instead of that uniform and consistent policy, which can alone secure the peace of any society—and particularly of a society so constituted as that of the West Indies,—we should be perpetually passing laws only to revoke them, as totally inapplicable to the supposed case, or as inadequate to the evil which they were intended to remedy. This is not a picture drawn from the imagination—it is the reasoning, which history and experience must suggest to all who reflect upon the subject; for, unfortunately, we have had awful examples in modern times of the danger of this proceeding.

The national assembly of France had in 1790 declared the right of the French colonies to pass laws for their local and internal government: but in the following year, excited by the arts and misrepresentations of the Abbé Grégoire, Brissot, La Fayette, and others of the Society of the *Amis des Noirs*, it came to the fatal resolution of attempting to regulate the affairs of St. Domingo

by a total change in the constitution of the island. Accordingly on the 15th of May a decree was passed, admitting the mulattoes to an equality with the white inhabitants in all their rights and privileges. They soon, however, had cause to lament this fatal interference—which, destroying the usages that had prevailed from the earliest settlement of the colony, involved the inhabitants—both proprietors and slaves—in a succession of the most dreadful calamities. The Governor of the Island, on receiving the decree, wrote to the French ministers, expressing his fears that “it would prove the death warrant of many thousands of the inhabitants;” and the event mournfully verified his prediction.

*The mulattoes and negroes began to perceive that the white proprietors were of no authority—they were taught to wonder at the respect, which they had hitherto paid them: that force of opinion, which alone secured their subordination, being unsettled, they began immediately to feel their own power, and one of the most horrible and destructive revolutions that perhaps ever desolated any country in the world was the consequence. Then it was that all France exclaimed against the interference of the government in the local administration of the colonies:—then it was that the commercial and manufacturing interests foresaw the ruin of their trade and shipping,—and the country began to perceive that all her citizens were more or less interested in the prosperity of those valuable establishments, which they were on the point of losing.—The national assembly endeavoured to repair their error, and voted on the 24th of September, by a large majority, the repeal of the obnoxious decree, which, but a few months before, had been carried by acclamation. But alas it was too late! the mischief was done—the torch of revolution was lighted, and no influence of the Mother Country could extinguish it. What influence, indeed,*

could she have? She had herself encouraged the blacks in their expectations of freedom—and her revocation of the laws, which she had made in their favour, at once destroyed their confidence, and taught them to think that they must forcibly obtain the rights, to which she had herself pointed out the path. It was in vain that France poured in her troops to the support of the white inhabitants—the strength and numbers of the revolted negroes were irresistible, and after various massacres and scenes of bloodshed, the colony was irrevocably lost to France.

Such, too, were the sentiments, excited last year amongst the negroes in our own islands by the fatal attempt to introduce the Registry Bill:—*great pains had been taken to make them believe that they were an oppressed race, whose condition was unnatural and unjust:—and that the King and the Parliament, at home, were about to pass some laws in their favor:—these they construed into an intention to make them free—and thinking that their masters alone opposed the measure, they were excited to take by force that which they had been taught to look to as their prescriptive right.* Fortunately the insurrection broke out only in Barbadoes:—the vigilance of the colonial governments prevented a similar movement in the other islands; but there is great reason to fear that in many of them a very dangerous spirit still prevails,—and indeed must prevail so long as the African Institution are allowed to pursue their present system. This spirit would become altogether uncontrollable, and lead to the most disastrous consequences, if once the mother country were to pass the boundary line of legislation, set between herself and the colonies.

Thus the British Parliament would not only assume a most laborious addition to its present duties, but would (to use the words of a celebrated writer on the nature of go-

vernment) "be in danger of meddling with a number of strings, the existence of which it does not now suspect. While it would only propose reformation and improvement, it would be in danger of removing the *salisman*, on which the existence of the fabric depends, or, like the daughter of King Nisus, of cutting off the fatal hair, with which the fate of the city is connected." *It would destroy that confidence in the master's protection, which is the source of so much satisfaction and gratitude in the minds of the negroes; it would undermine that authority of the white inhabitants, which grows out of proper control, and is not less the best safeguard of the order and happiness of their slaves than of their own properties.*

From what has been said we may safely draw the following conclusions:—that any interference on the part of the British Parliament is uncalled for and unnecessary—that the colonial legislatures must be best acquainted with the internal regulations which should be adopted in their slave code—that they have proved themselves, by the constantly progressive ameliorations, both able and willing to pass any laws which may increase the comforts and promote the happiness of the black population:—that the mother country should not be forward to agitate questions of this delicate nature between herself and the colonies—and that any such experiments would be dangerous in their nature, and hazard substantial benefits for imaginary advantages.

These conclusions are fully borne out by the opinion of a very able writer, who is also a member of the African Institution. In speaking of the colonial legislatures he says, "they are fully competent to take all the steps that may be necessary for improving the system. They are precisely in the situation, which ensures the adoption of wise measures; they are composed of men immediately interested in the pursuit of that

very conduct, which the good of the system requires—all the individuals, who form the assemblies, are concerned in the preservation and increase of the negro stock; in the improvement of the whole colonial society; in the gradual reformation of the general system. Of their superior ability to devise and execute such measures, we cannot entertain the smallest doubt. They are men, intimately acquainted with every minute branch of colonial affairs, and accustomed, from their earliest years, to meditate upon no other subjects. They reside in the heart of the system, for which their plans are to be laid, and on the success of which every experiment is to be held.

"The details of the slave laws require more minute and accurate acquaintance with an infinite variety of particulars, which can only be known to those, who reside on the spot. To revise the domestic codes of the colonies, would be a task, which no European government could undertake, for want of information and for want of time. Any parliament, council or senate, which should begin such a work, would find it necessary to give up legislating for the mother country, in order partly to mar, and partly to neglect the legislation of the colonies. Let this branch of the imperial administration, then, be left to the care of those, who are themselves most immediately interested in the good order and government of the distant provinces, and whose knowledge of local circumstances, of those things which cannot be written down in reports, nor told by witnesses, is more full and particular."\*

And after all,—who is it that would urge us to try this dangerous experiment? The Directors of the African Institution! Yes! these few individuals, forming themselves

\* See Mr. Brougham's "Enquiry into the Colonial Policy of the Nations of Europe."

under the imposing title of a "SOCIETY," are to change the whole nature of our West Indian establishments! It may be well, therefore, to enquire what claim they have established to our confidence as legislators? whether they have any real acquaintance with the system, about which they talk so much? whether they have acquired any experience in the management of West India estates? and lastly, whether they have, in any other instance, shown themselves competent to the regulation of distant settlements? Our limits will not permit us to enter into a long explanation upon these different points: we can do little else, at present, than refer our readers to those sources of information, which will give them, in detail, the various unfortunate experiments, which the Directors have already made.

1st, If there be any one so sceptical as to doubt the *accurate* information of the Directors, when they tell us "they have numerous correspondents in the West Indies, whose communications to them are various and important;" let him refer to the records of the Court of King's Bench, where a jury of their countrymen has, within these few days, found them guilty of a libel against persons of the highest rank in one of our oldest established colonies. This libel, which was false in every part, was founded on one of those *important communications from their correspondents*, and will serve at once as a specimen of their credulity, and of the grounds, on which they lay claim to their *intimate acquaintance* with colonial affairs!

2nd, How far they can boast of experience in the management of West India property,—will appear by referring to the papers, laid before the House of Commons on the 26th of June, 1816, on the subject of the Crown-estates in Berbice, which were entrusted to the care of a few leading Directors of the African Institution, since well known by

the title of the Berbice Commissioners. These papers,—particularly the letters from Governor Gordon,—present a very distressing picture of the consequences, which must always arise from persons undertaking a charge, of which they can have no practical knowledge. The privations and sufferings of the negroes, while under the care of the Commissioners, appear to have been so great, as to have attracted the notice of the Governor in the Colony: their want of food amounted almost to a famine, and the numbers who died were considerably more than double the deficiency, that took place in the years preceding their management,—After all the calls, which were made upon the Treasury, for the expenses of the estates, the account rendered to Parliament of the produce arising from them, whilst under the care of the Commissioners, was "NIL;" so that these large estates, with above 1000 negroes upon them, instead of yielding a considerable revenue to the country, have been a burthen to our finances! So much for their *experience* in the management of West India estates.

3d, Need we dwell upon their errors in Africa? Let the reader look to the details given by their own Chief Justice, whose high official situation there, and personal observations, gave him the best means of estimating the measures, which the African Society has pursued. Let him refer to the account of their proceedings, published by Mr. Grant, a member of the Council at Sierra Leone, and who was twenty years in the service of the Institution! Let him also refer to the correspondence, between Governor Ludlam and Mr. Zachary Macaulay, for further evidence of the means which the Directors have adopted to veil from the public their transactions in that unfortunate settlement, and of their fitness to legislate for the BRITISH WEST INDIA COLONIES.



